

The ROAD TO EQUALITY

HOW AMERICAN WOMEN WON THE VOTE

American women won the right to vote in 1920, after 70 years of nonviolent but determined political activism. They triumphed despite widespread opposition that came from average citizens to powerful and wealthy interest groups, such as the liquor industry. As in the case of other human rights movements, fierce antagonism at times erupted into violence against suffrage advocates. This violence did not deter the movement from pursuing its goal in a peaceful fashion.

Above, in 1912, suffragist Margaret Foley appeals to an Ohio crowd to support women's right to the ballot.

A landmark event in the suffrage story was the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, where women first demanded the right to vote. It was a landmark event in the suffrage story as the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, where women first demanded the right to vote. It was a landmark event in the suffrage story as the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, where women first demanded the right to vote.

Top one of the earliest leaders of Seneca Falls was abolitionist pastor Frederick Douglass, a life-long supporter of women's rights. His speech convinced the delegates to include the demand for the vote in the Declaration of Sentiments.

Despite having limited access to education, money, or political power, women worked hard to publicize their demands and attract potential allies. Top, working men and labor groups became suffrage supporters partly through speakers' direct appeals at factory gates. Center, men supporting equal rights march in the 1913 New York suffrage parade. Above, an automobile allowed suffrage speakers to tour 20 counties in New York State.

Suffragists waged night-long campaigns in state after state, and won the approval of state legislatures in 15 out of 46. Top, supporters in Hartford, Connecticut, led a picket meeting from a platform perched in a tree. Center, participants in the 1913 suffrage parade in New York City marched by train and on foot to show why working women needed the ballot. Right, Florence Lincoln volunteered many hours as a scout, leading The Woman's Journal as the "coldest and windiest" center in Boston, only five years old when she first heard Susan B. Anthony speak. She remained an activist and for 20 years in 1918. Bottom, thanks to the movement's successful efforts to make voters in 15 out of 46. Top, supporters in Hartford, Connecticut, led a picket meeting from a platform perched in a tree. Center, participants in the 1913 suffrage parade in New York City marched by train and on foot to show why working women needed the ballot. Right, Florence Lincoln volunteered many hours as a scout, leading The Woman's Journal as the "coldest and windiest" center in Boston, only five years old when she first heard Susan B. Anthony speak. She remained an activist

Two young college graduates, Alice Paul and Lucy Burn, arrived the long-distance federal amendment in 1913 by staging a political parade in Washington, D.C. With banners, marching bands, colorful costumes, floats (top), and an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 women marching, the March 3 parade drew national attention on the national level instead of the individual states. Center, shortly after the parade started, crowds and intimidated men and boys closed in and heckled the marchers. Some grabbed at the women, tore their clothes, insulted them, spit on them, and ripped banners from their hands. That policemen stood by and did nothing to help the marchers. Bottom, the suffragists completed their march only when the federal government rushed cavalry troops from a nearby fort into the capital city.

In 1906, the leading suffrage organization under Carrie Chapman Catt adopted a secret "Winning Plan." Its goal was immediate passage of the federal amendment. President Wilson's shift of suffragists' appeals in 1917, however, prompted Alice Paul and the more militant branch of the movement to picket the White House for the first time in the history of the United States. Top, for months, despite the start of World War I, women stood outside the White House with banners protesting the president's opposition to the federal amendment. Center, following days of violence against the suffrage pickets, police began to arrest them. Eventually, several hundred women were arrested and more than a hundred were sent to jail. Prisoner Alice Paul, bottom left, and several others undertook a hunger strike. They were constantly harassed, threatened with the issue of asylum, and eventually force fed through tubes forced down their throats. Bottom, as war raged in Europe, the prisoners' supporters kept up the pressure on the president and Congress. The administration - politically embarrassed by the treasury of the pickets - capitulated in late November. All suffrage prisoners were released. The president and a majority in Congress finally supported their cause.

On August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, approved by Congress and ratified by the requisite 36 states, became the law of the land. Top right, national suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt received a hero's welcome home in New York. As an inspiring speaker and deft-organized administrator, she developed the successful strategy of uniting women in each state to work together to get the national government to pass the suffrage amendment. Center, women celebrated victory in New York.

A suffragist makes a key addition, including the word "women" in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, on this 1915 cover. Illustration by Paul Stahr for Life magazine.